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Fostering Hope for a More Socially Just World: A Review of Corey Johnson and Diana Parry's Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide

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Abstract

Social justice is about hope and transforming society where resources, rights, and power are equitable without signs of oppression. Qualitative researchers escape the boundaries of the positivism and develop understanding in context. When a researcher combines a qualitative methodological approach with a social justice paradigm, he or she brings a sense of hope for a more just society. The book *Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide* by Corey Johnson and Diana Parry provides readers and researchers the theory and practice to make a positive, transformational difference in our world.

Keywords

Qualitative Methodology, Theoretical Perspectives, Social Justice Paradigm, Ethnographic Research, Critical Pedagogy

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Fostering Hope for a More Socially Just World: A Review of Corey Johnson and Diana Parry's *Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide*

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*Social justice is about hope and transforming society where resources, rights, and power are equitable without signs of oppression. Qualitative researchers escape the boundaries of the positivism and develop understanding in context. When a researcher combines a qualitative methodological approach with a social justice paradigm, he or she brings a sense of hope for a more just society. The book *Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide* by Corey Johnson and Diana Parry provides readers and researchers the theory and practice to make a positive, transformational difference in our world. Keywords: Qualitative Methodology, Theoretical Perspectives, Social Justice Paradigm, Ethnographic Research, Critical Pedagogy*

Reviewer's Statement

Imagine reading a book that reviews the basics of qualitative research, explains seven qualitative methodological approaches in detail, and provides an in-depth understanding of social justice through research. *Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide* by Corey Johnson and Diana Parry is that type of book that challenges you intellectually while touching your heart and encouraging you to self-reflect over your own worldview. With the feeling of hope, Johnson and Parry (2015) and other contributors challenge readers to use qualitative research "to create a more socially just world" (p. 7). The authors leave readers with the necessary knowledge and skills for social justice researchers and the commitment to make our society more equitable. As a professor of curriculum to doctoral students, I decided to use this text for a Diversity in Education course because it allowed me to help students with their qualitative research skills while discussing diversity and social justice issues. This one textbook covers a variety of skill sets and supports students in their future writing of a dissertation.

What Theoretical Perspectives Support Social Justice Inquiry?

Parry and Johnson (2015) provide an overview of seven theoretical perspectives, which support qualitative research using a social justice paradigm. The seven theoretical perspectives are as follows: Marxism; Critical Race Theory (CRT); Feminism; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Theory; Queer Theory; Poststructural Theory; and Postcolonialism. The overviews provide enough information to help readers and students understand when to base a study on a respective theoretical perspective. For example, postcolonialism addresses "issues of power and knowledge while paying attention to both local and global contexts" (2015, p. 36). Critical Race Theory operates "with the understanding that the civil rights movement addressed only overt racism...but the subtle racism that encompasses American society continues, supported by the legal system" (2015, p. 25). The theoretical perspectives chapter leaves readers with an overall understanding of all seven perspectives and the ability to apply that understanding to research that supports a more socially just society.

What Are the Common Features of Qualitative Research?

Although this book would not be the perfect textbook for a course that teaches the fundamentals of qualitative research, it does provide a foundation and overview of qualitative inquiry. The strength of this book is the integration of social justice and qualitative research and teaching students/researchers practical knowledge in the field. Johnson and Parry (2015) review basic qualitative concepts such as purpose statements, research questions, subjectivity, reflexivity, sampling, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and authenticity. The section on data collection thoroughly explains different types of interviewing such as semistructured interviews and focus groups, which uses “groupthink to generate data: multiplicities of perspectives, confirmability, dissention, new ways of thinking, notable silences, and diversity of experience” (2015, p. 57). This section is thorough enough to help a student/researcher write a research proposal or for a seasoned researcher to review major qualitative research concepts before applying newfound research skills with a social justice paradigm.

What Are Seven of the Most Common Qualitative Research Methodologies?

Johnson and Parry (2015) provide an overview of the seven common qualitative research methodologies in an early chapter in their book: Grounded Theory, Phenomenology, Ethnography, Case Study, Historic Inquiry, Participatory Action Research, and Expressive Inquiry. Then, the authors dedicate a chapter for each research methodology by introducing the methodology, providing historical and disciplinary roots, sharing strategies of data collection and data analysis, and linking the methodology with social justice. Each chapter provides a real world study on the research methodology and social justice to frame the study. These chapters are at the heart of this book because it provides students/researchers the background knowledge needed and model study to create a research study with a social justice paradigm. When a reader has completed this book, the authors have influenced the worldview and inspired him or her to take action to make our world more just and equitable for all humans.

How Does Ethnographic Research Support Social Justice?

To properly critique *Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry: A Methodological Guide*, it is important to delve deeply into one of the qualitative research methodologies presented in the book. In the ethnography chapter, the social justice paradigm is evident in the sample study. The author strives to help the Hillside residents by stating, “...rather than just trying to *understand* the people and the place of the Hillside, I’ve moved to *seeking justice*, through advocacy...informed critique of the social, political, and economic systems...injustices that the Hillside residents face” (Rose, 2015, p. 130). Without the social justice paradigm, the ethnographic researcher would try to understand the Hillside community and share their story with other readers but not necessarily help them directly. Rose (2015) lived with the Hillside community for over a year and used two theoretical perspectives, Marxist critical theory and poststructural theory, to shape the study and had the following research question: “How does a marginalized group negotiate everyday tensions between public and private space and between nature and society?” (Rose, 2015, p. 131).

The ethnographic chapter continues by discussing the historical and disciplinary roots of ethnography and sharing the importance of Margaret Mead as the most famous ethnographer. In addition, the authors share different types of ethnography research, such as autoethnography and critical ethnography that researchers may employ. For data collection

in ethnographic research, Rose (2015) stresses the importance of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, semistructured interviews, and photography, which “viscerally support and augment descriptions of place experiences and daily living” (Rose, 2015, p. 142). For data analysis, field notes from the observations and interviews share participants’ experiences within the cultural context. The chapter ends by connecting the ethnographic study with the social justice paradigm. In the case of the Hillside community, the theoretical perspective of Marxism addresses the power discrepancies and injustices within the community. The reader leaves this chapter caring about the Hillside community and understanding how to help other communities in similar positions. The balance of qualitative research methods and understanding of a social justice paradigm within context makes for an intellectual read that affects you emotionally.

What is the Future of the Social Justice Paradigm?

One area that Johnson and Parry (2015) address is the idea of interdisciplinarity, which is “a process where disciplinary boundaries are crossed and the analytical frames of more than one discipline are empowered by the researcher” (p. 283). This allows researchers to adopt more than one theoretical perspective and/or qualitative methodological approach to address difficult issues. One element of interdisciplinarity is the idea of theoretical inconsistency where researchers realize, for example, that not all readers will have the same understanding and worldviews of social justice, which encourages critical discussions. This is considered a positive aspect of research because it may begin a dialogue that would not have taken place otherwise.

Another future area for the social justice paradigm is the utilization of radical research that moves in unanticipated directions and embraces surprises throughout the process. “...Radical research is about blowing the lid off...Researchers...are able to question the conditions in which she/he is part of the problem of social inequities and are willing to own those mistakes...become part of the solution” (Johnson & Parry, 2015, p. 285). Radical research may focus on macro level issues or everyday issues that people face.

Lastly, the authors encourage researchers and teachers to link social justice research to critical pedagogy, where students learn how to read, critique, research issues, and create his or her own understanding of society and make the social justice paradigm part of everyday schooling. For this to be successful, students would need to have a critical pedagogical lens that questions and pursues a more just and equitable society for all.

Final Thoughts

Fostering Social Justice Through Qualitative Inquiry by Corey Johnson and Diana Parry is by far the most thought-provoking and inspirational text I have read this past year. Not only did I quickly see the benefits of using this text for my doctoral level diversity course, it changed my worldview as an educator and left an everlasting impression on the importance of a social justice paradigm and provided a sense of hope for a more just and equitable society. As a curriculum theorist, I will begin including critical theory along with the more traditional theories such as scholar academic, social efficiency, learner centered, and social reconstruction theories (Schiro, 2013). This text integrates the theory and practice that is needed to understand the material and implement the methods from a qualitative research social justice paradigm. I highly recommend this text for graduate level courses and for practicing researchers in the field.

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